

handmade: in search of an anarchist zine pedagogy

by kai schmidt

intro/locating myself/locating this zine

my name is kai (they/them). i'm a grad student at toronto metropolitan university and i study **zines**, **pedagogy** (teaching/learning), and **anarchism** (terms in bold are defined in the glossary at the end of this zine!). i'm also a zinester, and i guess i'd say that i'm politically an anarchist, but i'm not married to that label. i teach, too, both in official/traditional education settings and in less formal community spaces.

my fingers are all over this piece. you can see them in a lot of the scans i made, but they're also there in a metaphorical sense in that these are my interpretations, my thoughts, my understandings. i dislike the idea of monoliths—single truths, things that don't allow for difference and diversity—and i want to keep that central to the work i've done here. this is a piece from my perspective, my experience. but at the same time, there are a lot of voices happening in this zine, from other zinesters' works that i've drawn together, from academic theorists, from researchers. no work happens alone.

what is this zine? it's a record of thoughts: i read a lot and thought a lot and i'm putting it down here. it's also a record of research: i've pulled selections from things i read and did here. it's a part of research, too: making is a way of thinking, of opening up new possibilities, of learning by doing. it's a look at some things that have been done before me, by anarchists, by educators, by learners. it's an imprint of different communities, different efforts, different thinkers, different doers. it looks at similarities, differences, throughlines, departures, shifts. it critiques. it looks to the future, too: i hope for this to be useful to anarchists, to educators, to folks who want to learn or think about learning or to teach or to be in community with others.

in shorter form: it's a zine that teaches about how anarchist zines teach, or, it's a zine about how i learned about how anarchist zines teach.

why am i doing this? in some ways, it's my thesis. i went to grad school to get paid to do something other than have a full time job that made me tired and depressed. my thesis is the deliverable for that job of going to school. in some other ways, my thesis is actually something i care about. i want to live in a world where learning as an adult isn't tied up in deliverables or getting paid or paying to go to school or having the privilege to even be in university to begin with. i want to think and learn and share and make ways for this to be a thing that many people can do, actually do, and do together. i want spaces for learning that are critical and collective and grounded and make things better. it's not really about education, either. it's about the stuff that happens when we think and learn and talk and act together.

but, in the spirit of being critical, there are some big reasons why this zine is flawed. the one that i want to think most about is the academic aspect of it: like i've said, this zine comes from a place of immense privilege. i'm in grad school because i was able to get an undergrad degree first, because i was able to complete that degree, because a lot of money and time were involved that i had access to. at an even broader level, this zine is possible because of colonialism, from the university i attend (toronto metropolitan university, fka ryerson university, after an architect of the canadian residential school system) to the land that i work on: this zine comes to you from a white settler on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

despite these dubious origins, i try in this piece to leverage my privilege for good, to acknowledge and take accountability, and to learn from and avoid replicating failures of the past (and present). one example of this is the classic out-of-touch academic paper: one that draws on community knowledge and resources, and then generates knowledge or research or outcomes that aren't beneficial to the community and are inaccessible to anyone who doesn't have a phd because the language is just so complicated and it's all drowning in jargon and posturing and departmental nonsense. this is called **extractive research**. by making this a zine with a pull-out speed-read section, by focusing on using plain language and defining terms, by making it free and distributing it through community, and by keeping it grounded in examples and meaningful, actionable changes, i'm trying to do better.

what to do with this zine

whatever you want, really. read it, hopefully, but burn it if you need to. if you learned something from it that's exciting, tell people about that thing. share this zine. copy it if you like. start a free skool. make a zine. teach and learn. send me an email if you have questions or want to chat: kai.n.schmidt@proton.me

in a practical sense: there's a tl;dr pullout section. that's the quick version/bare bones/essentials only. for the longer stuff, read the whole thing. at the back there's a glossary of terms that you can check out for reminders. terms that appear in the glossary are in **bold** (except that one) and are alphabetized. if you want to read the academic paper version of this, it's hosted at

why i did what i did

it seems like a strange place to begin, before i actually talk about what i did. but i do this because i want to identify some of the **frameworks** i started from, some theories i draw on, and some of the central pillars of my work.

i'm doing **qualitative research**: this is research that doesn't rely on pure, hard numbers and data of that sort, but instead focuses on behaviour, experiences, and perceptions to understand *why* social conditions are the way they are.

one of the ideas/practices that i want to keep central to my research is **iteration**. this is a type of repetition where you keep returning to and looking at/working on the same thing, making changes, and then looping back around again after each pass is complete. visually, i think of this as a way of moving forward in a spiral shape. i do this for a couple of reasons:

first, i want to build **reflexivity** into my research design. basically, i want to make sure i'm self-aware and critical as i'm going, to avoid missing things, but also to research ethically. i also think there's a lot to be learned by not trying to get it all right, forever, on the first try.

another of the ideas/practices that i'm focusing on and trying to bring into my work is stuff around **materiality**. this is the nature of being physical, touchable, present, real. stuff that's made of matter, in the scientific sense. i'm focusing on this, firstly, because it's an important part of zines and zine culture. this is a big point of debate in zine communities: "what is a zine?" is always being discussed, but particularly to do with e-zines, or zines that are primarily made for/exist only digitally. this has some roots in zine history: with the invention of and rise in popularity of the internet, many folks in the early 2000s thought that personal blogs, which really took off at that time, were going to replace zines. in theory, this makes sense: people are expressing themselves without relying on publishers or others who might censor their ideas, and are sharing their direct experiences to small audiences, without large budgets. there's a lot of intimacy and informality that are similar to the way zinesters expressed themselves in paper zines.

now, of course, much of the way people use the internet has shifted towards social media, and people love to compare that to zines as well, for some reasons that are good (and some that are not as good).

- why material zines?
 - safety, security culture
 - body/physical self
 - history of zines
 - ubiquitous digitality

what i did

i started this project with a big, long, general series of questions in my head:

how do anarchist zines do learning and teaching? what are their visions of education? what do they want it to look like, smell like, taste like? who's it for? how do the zines themselves actually teach? how do they relate to traditional school settings, like universities and grade schools and colleges? what do they think about those things? are they trying to replace them or destroy them or just be something different that people can turn to if they want?

my official research questions looked like this:

How do anarchist zines understand, imagine, and enact alternative forms of **pedagogy**?

How does the **pedagogical** work of anarchist zines offer alternatives and/or resistance to **hegemonic** educational forms and institutions?

to answer these questions, i looked at five zines:

Anti-Mass: methods of organization for collectives (no date, sometime before 2004)

Getting to anarchism (random anarchist group, 2001)

Beyond Squat or Rot: Anarchist Approaches to Housing (Chuck Munson, 1997)

Educating for Freedom (Cindy Milstein, edited by Sarah Lawrance, 2007)

Fuck Your Phone (anonymous, 2024)

i chose these zines because they 'interact' with themes of both anarchism and education. by interact with anarchism, i mean the authors/zines explicitly label themselves as 'anarchists,' come from an anarchist perspective (even if they don't call it that), or talk about anarchist projects. by interact with education, i mean that the zines teach about something (anything really), have to do with teaching, learning, or school in general, or talk about an event or project that had to do with education/teaching/learning.

one zine came from my own zine collection: i bought *Fuck Your Phone* at the 2024 Anarchist Bookfair in hamilton. it doesn't say the word 'anarchist,' but that's where it came from. i think i paid like? \$1-3 for it.

two zines came from the Toronto Zine Library: i found *Anti-Mass* and *Educating for Freedom* in the Toronto Zine Library by searching their web catalog with the terms 'anarchism,' 'education,' and 'pedagogy.'

two zines came from the OCAD University zine collection: i found *Beyond Squat or Rot* and *Getting to anarchism* in their catalog by searching from their list of keywords for 'education,' 'anarchism,' and 'community activism.'

Anti-Mass is a zine that highlights the difference between 'mass,' which is basically getting a lot of people to support a movement, and '**class**,' which the author calls a 'consciously organized social force' or a group of people who realize that they're being oppressed or exploited and come together to resist. they talk about organizing through a **collective**, which is a small group of people who have the same politics and agree on a way to resist together. the author says these need to focus on local action, and should come into contact with—but not totally be absorbed into—other collectives. *Anti-Mass* pushes for people involved in resistance not just to focus on action, but also on analysis. they want to not just destroy systems of oppression, but invent and create the organization of a free society.

Getting to anarchism is a transcript of a conversation between anarchists that's been edited and rearranged to show how the people talking came from different backgrounds and experiences to get into anarchist organizing spaces. it covers folks talking about their upbringings, their experiences with being marginalized (being poor, being gay, etc.), how they got involved in politics, how they eventually found their way to anarchism, what types of actions and lifestyles they've been involved in, and what they think the future holds. it ends with a summary and critique of *The Weight of the World* by Pierre Bourdieu, a french sociologist and theorist who studied how power dynamics work in society.

Beyond Squat or Rot is a zine about alternative housing options that anarchists have organized or been involved in, including cooperatives (co-ops), co-housing, temporary autonomous zones (TAZ), bolos, and anarchist neighbourhoods. Munson gives definitions for each one, but spends most time on co-ops, listing advantages and disadvantages, tips for starting them, and personal anecdotes about living in a co-op. at the end, it's got a reading list of resources on cooperatives and on alternative housing and tenant resistance.

Educating for Freedom is a talk by Cindy Milstein that was transcribed and edited by Sarah Lawrance. the original talk happened at the unSchooling Oppression conference in Ottawa in 2007, which was all about critiquing traditional schooling systems and dreaming up alternatives together. Milstein asks the questions 'why anarchism' and 'why education' to give a background on why they believe these are two important topics, and how they should come together. briefly, they believe in anarchism because they see it as a way to go towards a better future—something that's **egalitarian**, non-**hierarchical**, **anti-oppressive**. they believe in education because they say it changes how we understand present forms of power, shows us the possibilities of the past, present, and future, keeps people **reflexive** and self-aware, and pushes things forward. Milstein then discusses anarchist education projects they've been involved in, including local **collectives** based on reading and learning together, non-**hierarchical** institutions they've been a part of, and larger social movements they joined. this zine also ends with a list of books, films, and links to conference audio from other speakers.

Fuck Your Phone is a zine about going to organizing and resisting power without using your phone. the author argues that everyone has been 'collectively deskilled' by using phones, and offers tips and guidance about how to do everything from navigate a city to go to a demonstration to hold a meeting without relying on a smartphone. it talks about reasons to not carry a phone, particularly to do with **security culture**. the author shares examples of technology that can be used to hack phones (and computers) and extract sensitive information, but mostly focuses on ways to change social norms around phone use to become less dependent on smartphones in order to organize better.

once i had chosen these zines, i read them over, like, a bunch of times. then i started coding them. coding is an academic research technique that takes a lot of forms. in basic terms, it's a way of looking at what is important or what stands out in research materials (like a transcript of an interview or an essay someone is analyzing...or a zine) and trying to find patterns, and then trying to understand what those patterns say about what you're researching. i chose to use **in vivo coding** and **pattern coding**.

in vivo coding: read over your materials and mark words/short phrases that seem important/significant. instead of applying your own labels, you keep them exactly as they appear in the text you're reading. this is good because it means that the voice/ideas/language of what you're researching is preserved, which can be important ethically if you're looking at materials that are/have historically been silenced or ignored, and can also be a good research practice because it prevents you from inserting your own ideas as a researcher in too strongly. keeps you humble.

pattern coding: it's an iteration from the first two, and is often something that happens after you've already spent a good bit of time with your research materials. in this type of coding, you start to apply labels to things that you may have already pointed out, and to form connections across texts or research materials. this is useful for zooming out from being really deep in an individual zine, and instead looking at the ways that zines are relating to political or social issues, each other, or generally larger things happening outside the text.

i chose to do all of these types of coding with a highlighter and a red pen on physical copies of the zines (don't worry, i scanned and photocopied them first). i did this for a couple reasons: first, like i said at the beginning, this project was all about **materiality** and physicality. i wanted to really feel what i was doing in my hands, in my body. i wanted to get close to the data and pick it up in my hands and turn it around and weigh it and have it with me in a physical sense. i had these printouts in my bag for months. i took them on the subway with me, on my bike, to a protest. i got rain marks and coffee stains and wrinkles on them. these, for me, were evidence of the work i was doing: these zines were never meant to be hidden away on a computer at a desk, they were meant to be out in the world. all of the zines i worked with here were created and shared in physical formats, and sure, some of them are up on digital distros, which is awesome for accessibility and scope and range and all of that. but i also think that there's something inherently material about zines. i think they're made for paper, made out of paper, and i wanted to keep my research on them in the same spirit. helpfully, i also just think better with a pen in my hand, and looking at a digital screen for too long makes me sad.

i also kept notes throughout this whole process. in **qualitative research** these are called **analytic memos**, and they're basically a conversation with yourself as a researcher, a place to write down things you might be noticing as you go, ask questions, remember what you did or are doing, etc. i wrote a lot of my analytic memos on the backs of my photocopied zines, or in my notebook, which i kept right next to or on top of the zines. this project, you'll probably see, is all about PAPER.

once i had coded all the zines on paper, i went back through and loaded the information into a digital spreadsheet (booooo). i did this to help with organizing, but also because it generated a LOT of data and i couldn't keep track of all of that by hand. (when i got to this step, my research journal reflected my digital-screen-related frustrations with a lot of swearing. even though it was a digital process, i ended up having a very bodily reaction to it.). i went through my codes, actually six times through, and funneled all of my codes into categories. i used the original language for the first couple of passes, and then finally assigned labels to each emerging category (called a theme): this is where the real **pattern coding** came in. skip to the section, "what i read into what i read" to learn what these themes were (no spoilers!).

back up: what's anarchism? what's a zine??

i'll start with the second question. chances are that if you're reading this, you know a thing or two about zines, but i'm going to add my two cents here because this is important to my research. as a side note, i'm not interested in policing the boundaries of zine-ness—i don't think that's a very interesting or useful project, and it has some ethical issues, too. instead, i'm going to talk about how i define a zine within this work and about what i think are some important qualities.

ok, so: a zine (briefly) is

- self-produced

- small circulation (i.e. probably far fewer people read it than something put out by a traditional book publisher or established professional magazine)
- usually doesn't make a lot of money, and profit typically isn't the motive for making a zine
- often talks about subjects that are outside of the mainstream (i.e. fan fiction, leftist politics, (a)sexuality, personal journals, etc.)
- often not copyrighted
- shared between people through community networks (i.e. your friend made it and gave it to you, or someone lent you it from their zine collection, or you met someone at a zine fair and bought their zine)
- has a political history: used in lots of political movements to share info/ideas
- take part in a **gift economy**, where zines are often traded or given to other **zinesters**/zine readers
- this one's controversial, but generally: zines can be digital OR material (i.e. made out of paper or something like it)

in my work, i look specifically at **material zines** for a couple of reasons: first, i just prefer them. i'm the researcher and i say i don't want to research **e-zines**. but, on a more serious note, i'm looking at material zines because zine history and culture draw a lot from the physical stuff. zines were around way before computers and the internet and i want to tap into the material side. in an increasingly digitized world, lots of zines are still material, so i want to know more about why that is! i'm also interested in the way that physical bodies and material objects interact. what feelings does touching a material zine spark?

and anarchism:

- a wide range of theories/actions/philosophies fit under the umbrella of anarchism
- general catchphrase: a "free society of free individuals"
- "no gods, no masters"
 - against the state, the church, and capital. however, this is more of a traditional/historical version of anarchism, and lots of anarchists are now interested in spirituality (often are just against centralized religious organizations)
- against **hierarchical** institutions/organizations
- against the use of force or coercion: people should be able to be autonomous
- against centralized systems of power: instead, most anarchists believe in smaller, local organizations (usually referred to as **federations**) and stand really strongly against anything **monolithic** (be it truth, power, etc.)
- for more on anarchism, check out this zine by my favourite anarchist author, cindy milstein: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/cindy-milstein-anarchism>

in relation to my research project, anarchism and zines have a lot of crossover. lots of anarchists use zines to distribute information because they're usually expressing ideas that are outside of the mainstream. the politics of zines and anarchism are also really compatible (partially because lots of anarchists have participated in shaping zine culture, but also because of the many non-anarchist zinesters who happen to share some political beliefs).

- zines are **autonomous** and pretty free to do/express what they want because they're avoiding **censorship** by being self-published. anarchists believe people should also be **autonomous**.

- zines circulate through and build communities. anarchists love community!
- zines, especially in paper format, are very anonymous. **security culture** is a feature in lots of anarchist actions, so zines can be a safe way to spread information/ideas without it being traced back to the person who wrote it.

anarchism is also really interested in education/learning/teaching. there are a bunch of anarchist education projects, like free schools and universities, and anarchist infoshops are also really common (more or less bookstores, usually with lots of leftist literature, community projects, and also zines).

what i read

you can see a lot of what i read in the background of this zine: i'm using scans of my coded, scribbled-on, crumpled up versions of the zines i did research on as a backdrop. i also include clippings of bits that i liked from them, or things i thought were funny or interesting or important. i also read a lot—like a LOT—of academic articles, books, blogs, etc. while i was working on this project. some issues with this: while some were awesome and i'd love to share them, a lot of them are really wordy, really academic-speak, really inaccessible. maybe you like that stuff, maybe you don't. maybe the bigger problem, though, is copyright and paywalling: a lot of this stuff is behind a paywall if you're not enrolled in a university that gives you access. if you'd like to read them in full, i'd suggest searching the internet 'creatively' if you get my drift (or email me and i might be able to help). i'm going to include a selection of my favourites and a couple quotes below. either way, here's your chance to peek behind the curtain of academia. for my full citation list for this project, check out the end of this zine.

books:

Anarchist pedagogies: collective actions, theories, and critical reflections on education, edited by Robert H. Haworth (2012)

- i loved the chapters "Anarchism, the State, and the Role of Education" by Justin Mueller, "Learning to Win: Anarchist Infrastructures of Resistance" by Jeffery Shantz, and "From Deschooling to Unschooling: Rethinking Anarchopedagogy after Ivan Illich" by Joseph Todd.
- great primer for learning (and maybe teaching) about how anarchists teach and learn!
- handily, lots of anarchists don't believe in copyright so you can find it at: <https://we.riseup.net/assets/219988/anarchistpedagogies.pdf>

Utopian pedagogy: radical experiments against neoliberal globalization, edited by Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter

- i particularly enjoyed the chapters "Introduction: What is Utopian Pedagogy?" and "Breaking Free: Anarchist Pedagogy" by Allan Antliff.
- in general, this is a really thought-provoking and inspiring book that makes me think about how i teach and learn.
- you can borrow this book for free from <https://archive.org/details/utopianpedagogy0000unse>

Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire

articles:

- ultra classic for alternative education. inspiring and has a lot of really important concepts and language for critiquing mainstream education.
- "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students." (p.72)
- "Liberation is a **praxis** [something that's both action and reflection]: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation." (p.79)
- available on the internet archive at:
<https://archive.org/details/PedagogyOfTheOppressed-English-PauloFriere> or you can most likely find it in your public library system

articles:

"Pedagogies of resistance: Free universities and the radical re-imagination of study" by Fern Thompsett (2017).

- i am obsessed with this article, but it breaks my heart that it isn't out there for more folks to access. if you have access to a university library system/know someone who does, try that!
- "if capitalist institutions condition us to teach and learn towards particular end-points, how do free universities attempt to escape these orbits? Does prefiguration in this context involve formulating pedagogies around alternative, non-capitalist end-points, or attempting to move away from the gravitational pull of endpoints altogether in favour of something that might be described as 'radical openness'? What are the potentials and risks posed by either avenue?" (p.26)

"Not for you? Ethical implications of archiving zines" by Kirsty Fife (2019).

- makes ya think about what it means to read and keep a zine, especially when you're at a university or an 'official'/non-community-based archive
- "The inclusion of zines within traditional archival institutions is, in itself, a radical act, given the types of voices and narratives present in their content, and the absence of these voices within pre-existing archival holdings. However, it is important to acknowledge that this process of collecting can in turn disempower the zine subject – through taking the materials out of their control ... Archival workflows including access protocols (including handling guidance, arrangement and description, digitization and interpretation through exhibition and display) all individually contribute to the way in which zines are understood and incorporated into history writing and other research" (p.235).
- available at <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/628412/8/art00005.pdf>

what i read into what i read

through a combination of reading (as the title of this section suggests) zines AND books/articles/blog posts/encyclopedia entries, coding, scribbling, talking to friends and also people i didn't even know (i.e. unsolicited infodumping), thinking, and entering a lot of data

into spreadsheets, i came to identify 9 themes that emerged across the zines i looked at. these are:

organization
interpersonal relationships
communication
recruitment
relation to the other
emotions-body-play
oppositional vs. propositional
practice vs. theory/analysis
learning

what was said about each theme

1. organization

- importance of collectivity, community, and small-scale and direct connections
- characteristics: non-**hierarchical**, non-exploitative, anti-authoritarian, **directly democratic**
- some types: **affinity group/contingent, federated** regions/confederation, decentralized politics

2. interpersonal relationships

- lots of different types: friends, lovers, co-op housemates, neighbours, study groups
- relationships and community-building are political and form the basis of anarchist organization

3. communication

- communication should be direct and person-to-person
- talking is key. many of the zines prioritize **orality** and are suspicious of the effectiveness/safety of written communication (even though the zines are written)—see **security culture**
- lots of reading lists in these zines (for books, zines, films, audio)

4. recruitment

- some zines say that potential allies/new anarchists should be 'recruited' to help add momentum to their movement
- other zines are really against recruitment **ideology** and against the idea of a **mass movement**

5. relation to the other

- this theme considers how each zine understands their relationship to the mainstream, i.e. the relationship between self (anarchist education zine/zinester) and other (mainstream/**hegemonic** politics/education/something else)
- some zines define themselves in how they're different from/better than the mainstream (what i call oppositional self-definition)

- for them, the other is a couple things: the enemy, the mainstream, **corporate liberalism**, surveillance, police departments, suburbanites, counterculture bums (i.e. people who don't pull their weight), misogynists
- they back this up by using in-group language, i.e. stuff that probably only anarchists would understand
- some zines understand **porosity** in the self-other relationship: rather than being united anarchists against the united other, *Educating for Freedom* argues that things are more complicated than that, and that allyship among related groups is more important than using labels to define political identities.

6. emotions-body-play

- a joint theme united through "feeling" (emotional/physical) and interest in pleasure. adds internal groundedness to the process of learning
- emotions are important because they help build the relationships that are so important to anarchist teaching zines
- negative emotions often sparked zinesters' involvement in (anarchist) politics
- play, humour, and pleasure are part of the way the zines are written (form) and the things that they're trying to achieve (content)
- reframe analysis (something that's often thought of as intellectual) as part of body-knowing (i.e. intuition, having things 'feel' right)

7. oppositional vs. propositional

- i was inspired to add this theme by Fern Thompsett's 2017 article "Pedagogies of resistance." she argues that anarchist free universities combine **oppositional** elements (i.e. resistance) with **propositional** elements (i.e. imagining/creating new stuff)
- some examples of oppositional elements from the zines:
 - anti: capitalism, grad school, patriarchy, heteronormativity, traditional schooling, demonstrations, wealth, class, power, privilege, mass organization, corporations, unity, smartphone-obsessed culture, copyright
- some examples of propositional elements from the zines:
 - direct democracy, participatory education, face-to-face formats, local politics, autonomy, collective houses, mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, personal freedom and responsibility, **collectives**, new social norms that don't rely on smartphones

8. practice vs. theory/analysis

- practice is *doing*, while theory or analysis is *thinking about/critiquing/understanding*
- each zine has a different balance of these modes, but all zines include practice/practical elements while not all zines have theory.

9. learning

- i.e. how each zine sees/understands education

- in zines with more explicit definitions of education, education is seen as super important
 - education supports autonomy and motivates and empowers people to resist, changes how we understand power in the present and historically, and gets us to think critically
- anti-**hierarchical** and anti-**hegemonic** educational institutions
 - however, a number of zinesters surveyed write that they have a good amount of experience in mainstream education, with many being university graduates.
 - some are very against universities, and some identify criticisms of them but aren't willing to fully give up participation

so, what does it mean?

what's the point of all of this work? i look back to my research questions to think about it:

*How do **anarchist** zines understand, imagine, and enact alternative forms of **pedagogy**? How does the **pedagogical** work of anarchist zines offer alternatives and/or resistance to **hegemonic** educational forms and institutions?*

or, translated:

*how do anarchist zines understand learning and teaching and what do their versions look like? what's the relationship between mainstream education and the learning that anarchist zines propose? do they consider anarchist **pedagogy** to be an alternative to or in resistance to mainstream education?*

*so, what is **pedagogy** for these anarchist zines? how do they do it?*

in short, it's grounded, practical, but also takes theory to be super important. anarchists want to think AND do. the zines that i looked at in this project are great examples of this: none of them are purely theoretical, because they all talk about stuff that can materially be done. they have tips, tricks, examples of when other people really did stuff. at the same time, this process of sharing stuff that has been or could be done is an act of 'thinking about it.' they're invested in sharing knowledge in a way that asks readers to think. different zines have different levels of thinking about the roots of what's happening—not all of them are getting down to really deep thinking about the theory aspect. at the same time, not all of the zines are equally invested in getting people to go out and do something new—some are just telling about what other people have done, while other zines are actively offering guidance for practical actions. however, all of the zines are doing a little bit of both thinking and doing. so, **praxis** is crucial for anarchist zine pedagogy.

pedagogy is also a collective, relationship-based, community-based undertaking: it's all about **relationality**, an Indigenous worldview that says that everyone and everything is in relation to everyone and everything else. relationships are connection and care and they're also responsibility and accountability. all of the zines, without exception, talk about building relationships, building communities, and working with others. learning isn't something that happens in isolation. many of the zines i look at refer to friends, lovers, study groups, housemates as sources of learning and teaching. even at the level of writing, these zines recognize themselves as part of a community of educational media by putting references to

and lists of further reading/viewing/listening. when we learn in relationships (with people or media), we not only get information, but we also get community, we watch out for each other, and we keep each other accountable for what we say and think.

the anarchist philosophy that resists single truths and **monoliths** is also really put into play here by offering other voices and ideas around topics. i call this **polyphony**—where a whole bunch of voices speak together, at the same time, creating some beautiful music-conversation-art. importantly, not everyone is saying the same thing: people get to disagree, debate, dissent. that's where the harmony comes in.

there's some tension in the next point: lots of the zines i looked at think that **pedagogy** happens best in oral form, or when people talk to each other directly. *Educating for Freedom* and *Getting to anarchism* are actually transcripts of speech/conversation, while the others have very conversational tones. that's great! but what are they doing writing zines about it, then? well, like some of the **zinesters** explicitly say, and like i'm inferencing, there's a tradeoff between reach, energy, and longevity that happens: it's hard (sometimes impossible) to always talk to everyone. many of these zines read like an invitation to start a conversation, with someone else, in another place and time. so, the characteristic i see here is **orality**.

lastly, these zines are all about process, not product. in other words, these zines aren't an end, but more of an incitation to start, to continue, to talk to people around you, to teach and learn from others, to read more, write more.

*what's the relationship of anarchist zine pedagogy to **hegemonic** pedagogical institutions?*

there's an implied question within this one, too: who are these zines for? and how does that audience relate to hegemonic institutions (i.e. traditional public/private schools, universities, colleges)?

this one doesn't get as simple of an answer—as is pretty characteristic of anarchism, there's a diversity of opinion in these zines on what the role of the teaching and learning of zines are/should be in relation to mainstream education.

some of the zines discuss their opinion on hegemonic institutions explicitly (*Getting to anarchism*, *Educating for Freedom*, *Anti-Mass*). all three of them are suspicious of it, particularly of universities, but to different degrees (basically, warmest to coldest in the order i listed them). i'm inferring just a bit here, but it seems like the relationship to university of each zine is impacted by the amount of university learning each of the author(s) has. for example, the authors of *Getting to anarchism* say they're "relatively rich in official post-secondary education" (2001, p.11) and also that they "move back and forth between academic learning and anarchist learning, learning more by what we share with each other than what we learn in university, but still not ready to give up university entirely" (*Getting*, 2001, p.21). this is the warmest/most positive view of hegemonic pedagogical institutions (read: universities) that i saw out of these three. meanwhile, the author of *Educating for Freedom* says "I have a B.A. and I probably shouldn't even have gotten that - I think I learned everything after that in study groups, in terms of what I wanted to study" (Milstein, 2007, p.20), and also that, in general, they really don't like or agree with university

education in its current state (especially grad school) mostly because of how expensive and commercialized it is. the author of *Anti-Mass* doesn't say anything about their own experience with educational institutions, but they do equate college writing (and college thinking, by extension) with diarrhea (n.d., p.12). making a little leap of faith, i'm going to guess that this author has spent limited time in higher education settings, just because they don't have super specific critiques or say anything about their experience with university/college. so: does spending more time in hegemonic pedagogical institutions make you more invested in them? does it let you see the more positive sides of them? or is the fact that you're the type of person who succeeds enough in them/has the right kinds of privilege to succeed in university make you already partial to it (i.e. positive feedback and accomplishment)? i could ask a whole bunch more questions about causality or comorbidity or whatever, but the fact (from my very small sample) is that the more university an author has completed, the more they're sympathetic to it. educated experience or deradicalization? you choose. however, for the purposes of this zine, it's safe to say that these authors see some amount of tension, even conflict and direct opposition, between anarchopedagogy and hegemonic pedagogical institutions. this tension means, among other things, that they see these two things operating in the same arena. the people who might be interested in going to university might also be interested in rejecting university in favour of zine anarchopedagogy, or might be people who'll do both. this says something about the audience of these zines: it's pretty broad. it's not necessarily catering to people who are automatically anti-university, or to people who are in university, or whatever.

another point to these three zines' issues with universities/colleges is more implied: even though they don't come out and say it directly, part of the issue is also with the (hierarchical) institutional part. i put hierarchical in parentheses because Cindy Milstein (author of *Educating for Freedom*) does discuss institutions, but the stuff they discuss is radically different from hegemonic pedagogical institutions: they're far smaller than your average college/university and are organized on a non-hierarchical basis. i don't think it's a coincidence that when each of the authors discusses what they prefer over university, they name small, collective structures (i.e. study groups, sharing with each other in a collective, taking part in collectives...see the theme here...). anarchism as a whole favours small, local, direct organization formats, so of course **anarchopedagogy** is going to do the same thing. when it comes to zines, two things happen: 1. the readership becomes a kind of collective. zines are generally small-circulation and usually pretty local (especially in paper formats). it's direct, in a way, because the reader is holding the zine, reading the words exactly as they were written by the author, not reinterpreted. 2. the zine is trying to spark collective action/learning. like i talked about in the section above, they're definitely inciting something: the practical teaching style, the examples, sometimes even the contact info of the author or the distributor, all invite the reader to go out and do it, collectively.

the other two zines (*Fuck Your Phone* and *Beyond Squat or Rot*) don't even mention pedagogical institutions, or pedagogy, really. instead, they're just engaged in doing it. i think this is pretty telling of their attitude: unconcerned, generally. another way to say this is that the type of pedagogy they're engaged in is parallel to hegemonic pedagogical institutions. rather than directly countering or explicitly rejecting mainstream sites of learning and teaching, this variety of **anarchopedagogy** is doing its own thing. it's not interested in comparing itself to your average university or private high school or state-run kindergarten or whatever variety of hegemonic learning. even if it isn't explicit, this is still a kind of

resistance: existing against/external to a ruling power is always going to be a form of defiance. reading into this non-recognition a little bit more, i think this says something about how this flavour of zine-based anarchopedagogy sees learning as non-institutional. neither of these zines says anything about going to a singular, specific place to learn more, or referring to a centralized movement against or for something. instead, both have pretty long reading lists attached, suggesting that there are many places to go to find knowledge, and implicitly that there are probably a range of answers (otherwise, you'd suggest just one!). *Beyond Squat or Rot* goes further and also dips back into that classic orality of anarchopedagogical zines—"just go talk to someone"—by suggesting that the reader phone around to others with experience to learn more. *Fuck Your Phone* says that the reader should talk to their organizing peers/trusted group to work out ways to resist phones. the kind of learning that these zines are imagining happens in step with the world and with other people. it's not isolated, isn't confined to one place or time, and doesn't have absolute, singular truths. instead, it favours **experiential** knowledge and **multiplicity** (of books, zines, films, people).

so, in summary, the answers to those research questions:

anarchist zine pedagogy is all about **praxis** (doing and thinking, practice and theory, stomach and brain). these zines are full of thoughts as well as guides on how to do things. in a way, they themselves are the product of thought where an author has then gone out and done something (printed a zine, spread knowledge).

it's also all about **materiality**. in general, the knowledge these zines share is based on people's experiences. this doesn't mean that it's only interested in practice. a lot of attention is also devoted to theory, but this theory is grounded in real life experiences. it's also based in what people experience in their bodies (feelings, touch, emotions).

it's also all about **multiplicity** and **polyphony** (where many voices harmonize together). these zines don't see pedagogy as happening in a singular place or expressing a singular truth. instead, they reference lots of other voices, through reading lists and recounting authors' and others' projects and experiences.

orality is another key component of anarchist zine pedagogy. these zines often have conversational tones or are transcripts of conversations. they encourage the reader to start conversations with others. in some cases, they explicitly say that oral communication is the preferred method. there's some tension in this idea, because these zines are written/visual communication. but they function to spark conversation and expand ideas outside of the space- and time-bound way oral communication works.

it's also all about **relationality**, an Indigenous worldview where everyone and everything is in relation to one another. these zines talk so much about relationships—friends, lovers, mentors, comrades, housemates—and about learning and teaching that happens through relationships and in collective settings. they also see themselves as part of pedagogy/knowledge communities, and acknowledge this by sharing reading lists or referencing things that others have done. also, by sharing tips and other practical guides, as well as by direct asking people to take part, these zines encourage their readers to join and create new communities of learning and teaching. zines themselves also circulate through

relationships—people share them with their friends, neighbours, people they meet at zine fairs. they're like a paper trail for all of those relations.

anarchist zine pedagogy contains a range of stances towards hegemonic pedagogical institutions (particularly to do with universities), but all of the zines i looked at are suspicious of them. this range varies from seeing university as, at best, a useful or practical (and lesser) addition to collective learning, to active rejection, to complete non-recognition. so, it's both an alternative to and a form of resistance to hegemonic pedagogical institutions, but leans more towards resistance.

tl;dr

my official research questions:

*How do **anarchist** zines understand, imagine, and enact alternative forms of **pedagogy**?
How does the **pedagogical** work of anarchist zines offer alternatives and/or resistance to **hegemonic** educational forms and institutions?*

translated: how do anarchist zines understand learning and teaching and what do their versions look like? what's the relationship between mainstream education and the learning that anarchist zines propose? do they consider anarchist **pedagogy** to be an alternative to or in resistance to mainstream education?

what i did: **qualitative research** on these five zines

1. *Anti-Mass: methods of organization for collectives* (no date, sometime before 2004)
2. *Getting to anarchism* (random anarchist group, 2001)
3. *Beyond Squat or Rot: Anarchist Approaches to Housing* (Chuck Munson, 1997)
4. *Educating for Freedom* (Cindy Milstein, edited by Sarah Lawrance, 2007)
5. *Fuck Your Phone* (anonymous, 2024)

what i found: 9 key themes from the zines i studied

organization
interpersonal relationships
communication
recruitment
relation to the other
emotions-body-play
oppositional vs. propositional
practice vs. theory/analysis
learning

takeaways:

what IS anarchist zine pedagogy/what are its characteristics

- **praxis**: practice and theory
- **materiality**: making real, material change; involving the body (physical and emotional feelings); experiential knowledge
- **relationality**: community-based, relationship-based learning and teaching
- anti-monoliths: references to lots of other material, **multiplicity, polyphony**

- **orality**: preference for spoken conversation, teaching, learning. these zines share a lot of similarities with oral communication, and also solicit their readers to go out and start conversations to learn more/share knowledge.
- process, not product. allows for **iteration** and growth

how does anarchist zine pedagogy relate to the mainstream?

- suspicious towards establishment education (i.e. universities, colleges, public and private schools), but to different degrees
- considers itself alternative to the mainstream, but leans more towards resistance to the mainstream. this means that it works to create something new, rather than just criticizing, but it also kind of wants to tear down what's already existing.

running glossary

affinity group

a group of people connected by a shared interest/goal.

analytic memos

notes taken during coding (research method).

anarchism/anarchy/anarchist

a political philosophy and movement that wants to dismantle institutions and systems that exploit, coerce (force into), or hierarchize people. it's interested in autonomous (individually controlled and independent) organizational systems instead, social justice, and freedom.

anarchopedagogy

anarchist pedagogy. umbrella term describing the type of pedagogy (learning and teaching) that anarchists undertake, to teach about anarchism and other stuff, too.

anti-oppressive

identifying, challenging, and dismantling systems of oppression (i.e. racism, homo/transphobia, misogyny, etc.).

autonomous/autonomy

able to make informed, non-coerced decisions (i.e. no one/nothing is forcing you or manipulating you to do something). anarchism is really big on autonomous individuals, and this is sort of a synonym for 'free' in anarchist philosophy.

censorship/censor

suppressing or deleting media (books, films, zines, etc.) that expresses things that mainstream society doesn't like or approve of (stuff like leftist politics, explicit sexuality, unpopular ideas, etc.). mainstream publishers often do this by refusing to publish stuff that won't sell/they don't want to associate with. zinesters avoid censorship by self-publishing their zines.

class

sub.media has a really good definition of this: "class is a way of organizing people according to who owns what." check out their whole zine on class:

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/sub-media-what-is-class>

collective

a small group of people who have compatible politics and agree on a way to resist together.

contingent

a subgroup united by a common feature. for example, think of a group of people who go to a protest together and watch out for each other.

corporate liberalism

the political theory that owners of large corporations and high-up government officials come together to become the elite/ruling classes. supposed regulations on business are actually made by people who are corporate executives or are allied with corporate executives. prevents revolution by keeping power away from lower classes.

direct democracy/directly democratic

governing decisions are made directly by the people, rather than by representatives/elected officials.

egalitarian

a belief that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities.

experiential

based on experience as opposed to abstract theory.

extractive research

academic/other research that doesn't benefit or give back to the community it came out of, and isn't accessible to the originating community.

e-zine

a digital zine.

federation/federated

an organization with smaller divisions inside, where each subsection has internal autonomy/independence.

frameworks

ideas or theories that underlie another idea/text/system/etc.

gift economy

a system where goods/services are exchanged like gifts. there isn't an expectation that there will be repayment, quickly or at all. it's all about reciprocity (exchanging stuff for mutual benefit) and generosity.

hierarchical

a system where people are ranked above/below one another by status or authority, and therefore have power over one another/are controlled by others. in other words, power is distributed unevenly. non-hierarchical forms resist hierarchy. instead, power is shared evenly between all participants.

hegemony/hegemonic

a social group/class that is dominant over broader society. in this zine, i talk a lot about hegemonic pedagogical institutions, i.e. mainstream education institutions created by those who are in power (i.e. state-run or private grade and high schools, colleges, universities).

in vivo coding

type of coding (research method); uses words straight out of what you're coding.

ideology

a system of ideas/beliefs/opinions belonging to a group or to an individual. often refers to a set of political beliefs.

iteration

a type of repetition where you keep returning to and looking at/working on the same thing, making changes, and then looping back around again. think of spiraling forwards.

mass movement

a political movement that has the support of large parts/most of a population. often relies on ideas of unity and centralization.

materiality/material

the quality of being physical stuff, in the scientific sense of matter. often also used to talk about the body physically existing.

monolith/monolithic

a single, united, structure (social, business, or politics) that is completely one thing with no variation or division. often used metaphorically to talk about united fronts of power that don't allow for dispute or diversity.

multiplicity

many things or a wide variety of things. this is kind of an opposite to the idea of a monolith.

orality

spoken word as a communication method, as opposed to written communication.

oppositional

the quality of resisting/opposing something or someone.

pattern coding

type of coding (research method); used to form connections across texts or research materials; useful for 'zooming out.'

pedagogy/pedagogical

the practice, method, and philosophy of teaching and learning.

polyphony

music where many voices/melodies harmonize together. i use this as a metaphor to imagine a lot of people talking together at the same time, not running over each other but making a big beautiful conversation. the important thing is not everyone has to say the same thing—different ideas make harmonies that sound awesome.

porosity

the idea that groups/ideologies aren't completely separate, and that things pass back and forth between them and mix. adds complexity to either/or-type definitions.

praxis

something that combines action and theory. in short, thinking AND doing.

propositional

the quality of proposing (suggesting) a plan of action.

qualitative research

research that focuses on behaviour, experiences, and perceptions to understand *why* social conditions are the way they are.

reflexivity/reflexive

keeping a critical eye on how your own beliefs/prejudices/etc. may be impacting what you're doing. basically, being aware of yourself and keeping yourself accountable.

relationality

an Indigenous worldview that takes everything to be in relation to everything else. relations have accountabilities to each other, take care of each other, share.

security culture

CrimethInc. describes this as "a set of customs shared by a community whose members may be targeted by the government, designed to minimize risk." check out their whole zine on this: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/crimethinc-what-is-security-culture>

zine

a small-circulation, DIY (do-it-yourself) publication that is usually spread among people who know each other or by small distributors (distros). often is anti-copyright and isn't intended to make money. you're holding a zine right now!

zinester

person who makes a zine.